

schools and I hope my colleagues will spend some of their time during the recess to do the same.

I also hope my colleagues will take the opportunity to review the components of this bill. I feel strongly it should be a critical part of any federal response to school safety issues. I look forward to its passage.

This is our opportunity to begin the process that will show our children we do care about their emotional well being and the future success of our nation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks recognition?

The Senator from Wyoming.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, first of all, I ask unanimous consent that Brady Hayek from my staff be permitted the privilege of the floor during today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I would like to take 12 minutes of the time allotted, and then the Senator from Montana would like 20 minutes following that time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISSUES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 1999

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, this is the last week before we go on recess. We will be gone approximately a month. We will have an opportunity to be home, to talk to our constituents about the issues that are here, to talk about what we have done during this calendar year, and talk about what we have not done for this year as well. We will be back, then, the first part of September. We will have, probably, 2 months to continue and to complete our work for this year.

There are 13 appropriations bills that must be passed to keep the Government running. They must be passed by September 30, the end of the fiscal year. This is a very difficult task. We are, hopefully, running on time. We passed eight bills out of the Senate. However, none has yet been sent to the President. So we will have a couple of months to wind up the year's work. I cannot tell you how important it is that we do complete that work. Of course, the Presiding Officer is the key Senator in that regard. He has done a great job.

We do not want the President to be able to put us in a position again of closing down the Government and blaming the Congress. I hope what we do is get these bills to him. I think we will do that. I cannot help but mention as we think about this a little bit, I hope in Congress we take a look at a biennial budget, as we have in many States—for instance, my home State of Wyoming. The Congress or the legislature would form a budget for a 2-year

period of time, which has advantages, particularly for the agencies, and we would have the other year for oversight, which is equally as important a task for the Congress—to oversee the expenditure of those dollars. So I hope we are able to do that.

This has been a tough year. We have had lots of difficulties, starting, of course, with the impeachment process, which was difficult. I don't know that it slowed us up particularly. On the contrary, we did a lot of committee work during the time the impeachment was going on. Nevertheless, it was tough. Then came the Colorado Columbine situation, of course, the tragedy out there at the school and, with that, the great controversy over gun control, which we are likely to see again now after the tragedy in Georgia. Then Kosovo was also an issue, of course, although Congress really was not as involved. It was pretty much the President on his own, committing troops there. Obviously, we were going to support them.

So it has been a difficult year. Despite that, it seems to me we have accomplished a great deal. I am a little disappointed that most of the accomplishments have been made without the support of the minority. Our friends on the other side have, in fact, opposed nearly everything that has been done—I think, unfortunately, often more to create an issue than to create a solution. That often is the choice we have; you can cook up something you can take home to talk about in political rhetoric, as opposed to trying to find some solutions.

But we have accomplished a great deal. Much of the controversy will continue, I suppose. There are legitimate differences of view when we are on the floor on almost every issue. Generally, the issue is the larger issue of whether or not you want more and more Federal Government, more and more Federal regulation, more and more taxes—which is basically Senators on that side of the aisle as opposed to this side of the aisle, where we are looking for limited government, where we are looking for less regulation, where we are looking for an opportunity for people to spend more of their own money.

So basically, when you get down to it in almost all these issues, if you really pare it away, that is the debate. Legitimate? Yes, indeed, it is legitimate. I happen to be on the side of being more conservative, of thinking we ought to be moving more and more of these decisions back to the States and to the counties rather than deciding everything, one-size-fits-all, at the Federal level. But these are the differences, and they are the basis for most of the things we find in conflict. We have had less cooperation from the administration than I had hoped we would have, from that side of the aisle. I think the President is seeking to change his image so the politics become more important than the movement of the congressional budget.

Let's review some of the highlights. The most recent one, of course, is the passage of tax relief, something I think is very legitimate, perfectly logical. We went through great debates about it, of course. One of the keys, naturally, is that you have to talk about reduction of taxes after having done something to save Social Security, having done something to strengthen Medicare. That is part of the program. That is not the choice.

We see these polls that are run from time to time. They say: Would you rather have Social Security protected or would you rather have tax relief? That is not the issue. That is one of the things we worked at. All of us are setting aside this surplus that comes from Social Security for the preservation of Social Security. These funds which will be used to reduce taxes and give some tax relief are beyond that.

I think one of the best illustrations is the Member who had three dollars—three dollar bills. This is basically the surplus we are looking at in the next 10 years, \$3 trillion, each of these. Two of them are being set aside for Social Security. Tax relief constitutes about 75 percent of the third one, with the additional amount of the third one being set aside for spending and for Medicare. The press has not been very helpful, of course, trying to get that understanding. But in any event, I think that is a real movement forward.

The thing one also has to keep in mind is, if there is money lying around here, it is going to be spent. It is going to be spent enlarging Federal Government. So if you go back to that original thesis, you go back to the original notion that you would like to move activities back closer to people, you do it that way rather than bringing more and more money here that inevitably will be spent increasing the size of Government.

I think we have some hope there. Both Houses have passed some tax relief. We will see if we can find a way to put that together, hopefully this week. Then it will be up to the President to say whether he wants to spend more and more money, wants to spend \$1 trillion on 81 new programs, or let the American people have an opportunity to spend some of their own.

Education? Our position again has been that the decisions that are basic to elementary and secondary education ought to be made closest to the people. They ought to be made by the States and by the school boards. Sure, we have an obligation to provide some financial help, but the Ed-Flex program that was passed by this Senate allows those decisions to be made more at home.

I can tell you, the delivery of education is quite different in Wyoming or different in Alaska, the State of the Presiding Officer, from what it is in New York—and properly so. But to make that work, then, the local people have to have that opportunity. We have done that with Ed-Flex, and we had some other educational programs.